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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#) [PINR](#) [ENRG](#)  
SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: BA'ATHIST-ORIENTED ARRESTS AND  
FIRINGS STOKE SUNNI FEARS OF JUNE 30 CF PULLOUT

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John G. Fox for reason 1.4 (d  
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This is a PRT Salah ad Din (SAD) reporting cable.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: As the June 30 deadline for implementation of the Security Agreement approaches, several local leaders have told the PRT that SAD residents are increasingly concerned that the Government of Iraq (GOI) intends to take punitive actions against SAD residents and Sunni leaders. As evidence, they point to the recent arrest of two reputed former Republican Guard officers and the Ministry of Oil's (MOO) decision to fire 97 former Ba'athists from the Bayji Oil Refinery (BOR) in SAD. Collectively these events feed a growing sense of unease that a reduced U.S. presence will result in decreased influence and security for Sunni Arabs throughout the province. END SUMMARY.

#### ARRESTS OF FORMER OFFICERS FEED SECTARIAN FEARS

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¶2. (C) The arrest of two Ba'ath Party (BP) members in Tikrit has sparked fears among SAD residents that the reduced U.S. presence in Iraqi cities will lead to an increase in hostile actions by the GOI against Sunni leaders and institutions. On June 21, a Baghdad-based Military Intelligence (Istikbarat) unit arrested two Tikrit residents and detained several others. According to former SAD Governor and current PC member Hamad Shekti, the arrested men were Muhammed Rajab and Makai Noman, both of whom served as officers in the Special Republican Guard. They were reportedly involved with hiding material related to chemical weapons programs from UN inspectors during the Saddam Era.

¶3. (C) Following the arrests, Tikrit Grand Mosque Imam Yahya al-Atawi called a meeting of local sheikhs and tribal leaders, which was broadcast on Salah ad-Din TV, and called for SaD residents to show unity to prevent "unidentified security forces from outside the province" from arbitrarily arresting local residents. In a June 23 meeting with PRT Econ Chief, COL Mohammad Faris, an adviser to Provincial Council Chairman Abu Mazin, said that, while he viewed the arrests as unnecessary and illegitimate, people such as Imam Yahya were "wrong-minded to make themselves news anchors" for events that make SAD residents fearful of the GOI. He added that while many SAD residents had at first been hostile to the presence of U.S. Forces, they now understand that their presence is the "only thing protecting us from Iran."

#### MOO ORDERS FIRING OF 97 EMPLOYEES FROM THE BOR

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¶4. (C) Separately, BOR Director General Ali Obeidi contacted U.S. Forces on June 21 to report that the Ministry of Oil had ordered him to fire 97 former BP members who work at the refinery. According to Obeidi, the decision to dismiss these employees originated with MOO Security Director Najad al-Sadi. Obeidi said he disagreed with the decision to dismiss these employees, since many of them had specialized technical skills that could not be readily replaced. Among

the 97 employees are nine general managers, 20 branch managers, and the Production Manager, Sa'ad Khalaf. Obeidi estimated that, without these engineers and technicians, the production of refined fuels (benzene, diesel, and kerosene) would be decreased by up to 35 percent. Obeidi said he had received similar orders previously and planned to delay or resist these orders as long as possible.

DE-BA'ATHIFICATION REMAINS POLITICAL ISSUE

15. (C) In a June 23 meeting with IPAO, Raid Khutab, a political figure in SAD who plans to run for a Council of Representatives (COR) seat in January, said that the arrests and other recent events fed the popular perception of GOI persecution of Sunnis. According to Raid, the issue of de-Ba'athification in SAD is being used by pro- and anti-GOI political leaders to bolster support for specific political parties in the build-up to elections in January. Sunnis and former BP leaders exploit fears of the Shi'a-led GOI, while Shi'a leaders in Baghdad garner support by being perceived as punishing former regime elements for their crimes.

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